# The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

February 14, 1995 Contact: Denise Horstman

**ART MUSEUM HOLDS FESTIVAL OF AFRICAN DRUM AND DANCE**
**Saturday/March 4 and Sunday/March 5**

The Art Museum is holding a free weekend *Festival of African Drum and Dance* on Saturday, March 4, and Sunday, March 5. Saturday workshops will be at 10:30 am-12:30 pm and 2:00-4:00 pm; Sunday's concert is at 3:30-5:30 pm. Enrollment and seating are first-come, first-served; no registration is required. (Complete details are below.)

Museum educator and *Festival* coordinator Robin VanLear says, "The public was so delighted with the museum's 'Weekend Celebration of African Culture' during last summer's exhibition of Benin art that we immediately began planning this event. We hope our audience continues to realize that, although the museum acknowledges February as African-American History Month, we spotlight African and African-American history and creativity throughout the year." Attendance at last summer's workshops exceeded enrollment expectations, and six hundred people attended the Sunday concert.

A backgrounder on the Iroko Drum and Dance Society is appended to this release. For photographs, bios, or complete concert program information, please contact Denise Horstman at 216/421-7340, ext. 262.

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**African Drum and Dance Workshops**
Sat/Mar 4, 10:30-12:30, repeated at 2:00-4:00 (free; first-come, first-served)
Make a drum and learn a rhythm in *Drumming and Drum-Making* with Craig Woodson and Baba David Coleman (limit: 60). Woodson is an ethnomusicologist, percussionist, and teacher of musical instrument-making; Coleman is a percussionist specializing in African drumming, African/Caribbean drumming, and drum-making, and co-artistic director of Iroko Drum and Dance Society. Learn a West African dance in the *Dance Workshop* with Marie Basses (limit: 50). The Senegal native and former dancer with the National Ballet of Senegal is now one of the top professional dancers in the U.S. specializing in traditional African dance. Open to all ages; children under 12 must be accompanied by someone 16 or older. Drum and dance workshops will be combined during the last half-hours of morning and afternoon sessions.

**African Drum and Dance Concert**
Sun/Mar 5, 3:30-5:30 (free)
*The Call and the Response: From Africa to the Americas*, written by Lyneise Williams, co-artistic director of Iroko Drum and Dance Society. Iroko with featured guest artists. Saturday workshop participants are invited to join Iroko on stage for the final piece.

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Backgrounder

**The Iroko Drum and Dance Society (Iroko)** teaches and performs the African cultural art forms of music and dance. Iroko teaches classes and conducts workshops on drum-making, drumming and dance throughout the Greater Cleveland area and within the state of Ohio. On an ongoing basis, Iroko conducts drum and dance sessions at the Woodland Village (formerly Woodland Recreation Center) and The Cleveland Museum of Art Teacher Resource Center, and conducts workshops at schools throughout the area.

Iroko performs drum and dance productions based primarily upon the cultural traditions of West Africa. It is comprised of eighteen African-American female and male drummers and dancers who range from age three to adult. One of the unique features of Iroko is its drum corps of girls and women. Iroko is the only African-American drum and dance company in which female drummers provide the bass support, reflecting the fundamental role that African women play in the musical support of their cultural rites and ceremonies.

Iroko seeks to foster such positive aspects of African culture as communalism and interdependence, and makes them an integral part of workshops, classes and performances. Activities are specifically designed to address so-called deviant behavior and low self-esteem among African-American youth. This is accomplished through the crafts of drum making, drumming, dance, costume design, and performance.

Iroko was founded in 1991 by master drummer David Coleman on the premise that African dance and music is not only a performing art, but also a living art which must be shared and preserved. Created to expose African-American youth to the variations of African art and culture that exist around the globe, the primary mission of the company is to teach and perform artistic interpretations of African culture that are authentic and accurate in their representation. Every rhythm and dance movement that is taught and performed is meticulously researched for its historical and cultural significance to the region of its origin. Because West African cultural tradition is oral, it is imperative that every opportunity be used to learn it and preserve it so that this and future generations can benefit from its inherent wisdom. Iroko is committed to teaching the values extant in African culture and demonstrate the ways in which its tenets can be practically applied to daily life. Helping so-called at-risk youth learn the science of drum making, for instance, has great potential to positively impact his or her self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.

In the African country of Nigeria, the Iroko tree is believed to be a sacred tree that houses the spirits of the ancestors. It is not uncommon to see gifts and offerings for loved ones left at the foot of this tree for those who have passed on to the ancestral realm. Among the primary goals of Iroko is to positively impact African-American youth by sharing with them the legacy of their ancestry, teaching them the ancient scientific principles inherent in African cultural tradition, and showing them how those principles are relevant and useful in their daily lives.

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Iroko founder **Baba David Coleman** is a master drummer and drum-maker from New York City who has been a drummer for thirty-seven years. He is known to Clevelanders as artistic director of Iroko and for his performances with Dr. Craig Woodson for Young Audiences of Greater Cleveland. He specializes in playing the djembe drum from Mali and the conga drum used for Afro-Cuban rhythms. Drum-making, traditionally passed down from father to son in specific African families, was taught to Baba by his godfather, Baba Chief Bey of New York City; Baba Chief Bey, at eighty years old, is the oldest living African-American hand drummer in the country, and learned his art from elders in Africa as well as from his own ancestors. Baba's detailed knowledge of drum construction and, more specifically, the drum "head" (or playing surface) tension system, attract drumming students to him from all over Ohio and from Pennsylvania for drum repairs, purchases, or drum lessons.

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